A
SERMON
OCCASIONED BY THE
DEATH
OF THE MOST HONOURABLE
FRANCIS Marquis of TAVISTOCK.

BY

The Reverend THOMAS BEDFORD, B. A.

Of St. John's College, Cambridge,

AND

Chaplain to the Right Hon. Earl GRANVILLE.

LONDON:

Printed for J. Dodsley, in Pall-mall.

M DCC LXVII.

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W. Musgrave.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

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ON THE DEATH OF THE MARQUIS of TAVISTOCK.

2 SAMUEL xviii. 33.

And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, thus he ſaid, O my ſon Abſalom, my ſon, my ſon Abſalom! would God I had died for thee, O Abſalom, my ſon, my ſon!

IT is owing to the moſt ſtriking calamities of life, that we ſee what feelings the human mind is capable of. If Abſalom had not died in actual rebellion, we had loſt a fine opportunity of diſcovering to what perfection of tenderneſs a father's nature could have attained. In expreſſions of ſorrow there is uſually the moſt ſimple eloquence. It is a paſſion that dictates a language peculiar to itſelf. A fondneſs for the dreſs and ſtudied ornaments of language, makes us overlook nature in her own attire. We paſs over ſome of her fineſt expreſſions, ſupinely ignorant of their ſimple beauties. We muſt be made to feel by other means than nature at firſt ſeems to have intended, or we do not feel at

all. The firſt emotions of the heart expreſs our grief the moſt naturally, becauſe they admit of no diſguiſe, but are ever genuine and artleſs. We are indebted to the ſimple force of its operations on our own kindred feelings, that we catch a ſympathy from them. They ſhew us ourſelves in others, and bid us feel for a diſtreſs though it is not indeed our own. Stoiciſm and indifference at alarming events, can never raiſe an empire over the tender emotions of the heart. If ſympathy be a weakneſs, wherein may we exerciſe thoſe finer paſſions which are the perfection and ornament of the human mind? Without them we ſhould degrade into barbarity, and ceaſe to be men in every thing but appearance. We cannot admire a character that is without them. The want of them alone ſinks it into our deteſtation. Nature cannot produce many ſuch monſters as * Herod. She ſhews us ſuch only as exceptions to her general productions. Our univerſal abhorrence of them is a ſufficient proof. The private hiſtory of David abounds with inſtances of the moſt delicate ſenſibility. His ſorrow for the death of Abſalom is one. Although Abſalom had forfeited his title to the countenance of the king, by a ſeduction of his ſubjects from their allegiance, yet he could not forfeit his title to the affection of a father. He might ceaſe to be a ſubject, he could never ceaſe to be a ſon. There is ſomething in that name which ſpeaks a relation too near and dear to be cancelled. A gentle nature revolts at ſo much violence againſt itſelf. The officious deſtroyer of the king's ſon might think he did a meritorious ſervice to his ſovereign. David could not think it ſo. Though he ſaluted every man with a ſmile of bountiful complacency, inaſmuch as the hearts of all Iſrael were after Abſalom; yet the father had an heart, wherein every thing that was tender ſpoke in his behalf. His popularity and artful addreſs in ſtealing the hearts of the people, rendered him a

* The want of humanity and filial affection made Auguſtus ſay of him, That he had rather be Herod's hog than his ſon.

MACROB. AUREL.

dangerous

dangerous competitor; they did not perhaps make him unworthy of being David's ſon. His princely perſon, early proweſs in arms and capacity for public judgment, made David, as he was retiring to pour out his ſorrow in ſecret, wiſh that he had died for him. How natural and unaffected this is, they only can judge who have man enough to feel, and father enough to experience the force of it in themſelves. He looked upon his ſon as cut off at a time of life when the ſpirits of men are moſt active, and only want proper ends to make them capable of producing the moſt happy effects; when the mind, impatient of inglorious indolence, is ever ſtarting into projects which receive their tincture from ſituation and circumſtance; when the generous warmth of youth makes men jealous of their country's honour, and fills them with a laudable ambition to perpetuate its glories. His own arm grew unnervated, and unfit for grand achievements. He had lived to every valuable purpoſe in life. As he advanced in years, he grew daily of leſs conſequence to the general welfare. He did not experience the ſame glowing ſpirit and hardy valour, which had heretofore actuated his councils, and animated his ſoul. He knew this, and the wiſh was benevolent, as well as tender. He looked back into paſt life, and ſaw his former ſelf in Abſalom. The remembrance of ſome incidents, like a powerful charm, ſtarted up a thouſand apologies in his favour. The tender ties of natural affection are too ingenuous to admit of the recollection of ſuppoſed or real injuries. His crimes were ſuch as were juſtly chargeable on the heat of youth, and the counſels of Ahithophel. The one cooled by years into a more moderate temperament; and the other, collected by experience, left behind the promiſe of a great man.

You have already anticipated my deſign; the very relation of this ſtory muſt have brought up into your mind a loſs, congenial in many circumſtances with the unhappy end of David's favourite ſon: I mean, the ſudden and affecting death of the Marquis of TAVISTOCK, the

the very impreſſion of whoſe riſing greatneſs, and exemption from the other's faults, ſuggeſts many reaſons of ſorrow which could never take place in the public lamentation for Abſalom. Alike they were indeed in the general eſteem of their country, but in nothing did they differ more than in the means of attaining to it. What the one ſtole as it were by the ſemblance of virtue, the other obtained by real merit. The one ſeparated from his father by an imprudent rebellion, the other never eſtranged from his through want of filial duty. If all Iſrael mourned for the one, our grateful country pays the ſame laſt honours to the obſequies of the other. His very name calls up the idea of a man diſtinguiſhed by many uſeful qualities, to the hopes of whoſe integrity the public voice gave the moſt ſolemn atteſtation. I will not ſay patriotiſm, becauſe that pure and ſacred name is ſo often proſtituted upon the moſt trivial occaſions, as to have loſt all its energy and meaning.

There is ſomething we ſee in men, that, as it matures, gives the promiſe of a fair increaſe. This rarely eſcapes the general notice and eſteem, and is carefully traced upwards, and guarded with a watchful eye. We urge our thoughts into futurity, and antedate the æra of its luſtre and appearance. He had a ſoul formed to cheriſh the ſeeds of public virtue, which were about to open themſelves into ſomething beneficial to the general good. The intereſts of mankind are interwoven with ſuch characters. The public loſes the fruits of all their valuable attainments. By lamenting for ſuch a one, it laments partly for itſelf. The nobleſt kind of ſelf-intereſt compoſes their ſorrows. They had reaſon to expect much from ſo illuſtrious a perſonage. His rank and birth naturally called him up to the moſt honourable departments in government, and his integrity promiſed the moſt honourable diſcharge of his duty. A man's public character is often diſtorted, 'tis ever changing the ſemblance of its features. Opinion divides itſelf into various conjectures as to the motives and tendencies of its conduct.

In private life, there is no ſuch difference of opinion. We are all agreed as to the virtues that compoſe an amiable and uſeful character. We do not with-hold our aſent to their real worth, where-ever they are found. In all public ſocieties a ſecretion of character will be made; a good one cannot but be valued and eſteemed. The torrent that makes the moſt noiſe may gain the moſt admiration, but 'tis the ſilent ſtream that fertilizes and enriches a country. The practice of the ſocial and domeſtic virtues gives a luſtre to a character which, without them, is but an unfiniſhed piece. It may have excellencies to attract the eye, but it never can pleaſe, becauſe it never can be natural. Birth and riches may gain outward reſpect, but they cannot inſure the eſteem of the heart. Benevolence, and the kind offices of humanity, do more, they even arreſt it. We eſtimate the loſs of men by their powers and inclinations of communicating happineſs to thoſe beneath them. And how many opportunities has a truly great and good man? Multitudes muſt receive from ſuch numberleſs inſtances of beneficial kindneſs. A right diſpoſition of their favours may make many worthy men happy. To whom can diſtreſs apply itſelf more properly for relief, than to thoſe whom they know have a heart willing to do every thing to leſſen it. Whenever a real object of pity preſents itſelf to ſuch an one, its aſſiſtance is not circumſcribed by the little conſiderations of relation or tribe. It gladdens on the happy occaſion, to ſhew how diffuſive true benevolence is in itſelf; how boundleſs the heart muſt be that gives habitation to ſo godlike a prerogative. When we take a near view of the world, we diſcern men of all characters, in every rank, in every ſtation. Among the lower claſs we frequently meet with exalted minds, with tender and generous hearts, who are no ſtrangers to the pleaſure of doing good. And we have a recent proof at hand, to ſhew, that it is no inconſiſtent thing to be great and to be good. Men never appear ſo godlike as in the communication of good to others, becauſe this intimates a ſuperiority of nature, as well as a greater fulneſs of poſſeſſion. Beſides, ſuch a temper clearly proves,

that

that there is a ſecret pleaſure in being able to make others happy. Nothing bears ſo near a reſemblance to the bleſſedneſs and joy of God, as a delight of this kind, and therefore nothing can ſo much exalt the nature of man. When ſuch tempers are placed in the higheſt rank of life, and in the midſt of powerful connections, what a bleſſing may they not prove to mankind? what hopes do they not raiſe in our breaſts, in their public and private capacity? Their dignity and affluence muſt needs give weight to whatever is ſuggeſted by their goodneſs; and, from the nature of their circumſtances, they cannot avoid, upon a thouſand occaſions, making glad the hearts of men. But when ſuch noble proſpects, ſuch pleaſing hopes, ſo juſtly founded, are cut off from all their ſervices to the world by one untimely ſtroke, what language can expreſs the public loſs? Our country can no longer keep ſilence, but burſts out into the moſt pathetic ſtrains of pity and reſentment.

Virgil was well acquainted with the moſt noble and generous feelings of human nature, and perfectly knew what was neceſſary to finiſh a great and happy character. In his fine deſcription of the Elyſian fields, he never but once repreſents the bleſſed as capable of feeling any thing like grief: and, perhaps, that once doth him more honour, as a man, than the whole Eneid. The occaſion of this elegant and beautiful turn in the Roman Poet was, in many reſpects, exactly ſimilar to the preſent unhappy circumſtance. While Anchiſes is pointing out to his ſon the long ſucceſſion of heroes and illuſtrious perſonages that ſhould appear in after times at Rome, Eneas caſts his eye upon Marcellus, and becomes eager in his inquiries. The Trojan father, becauſe happy, muſt retain a love for mankind. Could any thing be more natural, than that he ſhould expreſs ſomething like compaſſion for ſo great a loſs to the world*? The cruel fates only juſt ſhew *him* to the world,

* Tum pater Anchiſes lacrymis——obortis,
O nate, ingentem luctum ne quære tuorum,

who

who might well be the darling of human kind. While Anchiſes weeps for Marcellus, he teaches us the true reaſons of lamenting our own loſs. Theſe two noble and promiſing youths were equally eſteemed, alike worthy of reſpect. They were each unexpectedly cut off by an untimely ſtroke, and both died with the ſame circumſtances of hope and expectation from their country. The ſame language is juſtly applicable to both *.

Ye great inheritors of ancient and honourable nobility, if there be in your nature any congenial ſpirits, let the remembrance of ſuch a character call them out into thought and action, Think over its ſeveral virtues and good qualities, and glow with co-rival excellence. Qualities at firſt but fancied in ourſelves, have, by ſpeculation only, and approving concurrence, riſen into real ones. Let me add, a moderation and gentleneſs, which placed *him* above the reach of party, prejudice, and reſentment. To reſtore peace and good neighbourhood, by ſoftening differences, inſtead of exaſperating them, is the moſt pleaſing means, and the moſt effectual. We are obliged, by ſo much condeſcenſion, to the humours and caprices of men. We too frequently overlook ſuch qualities as theſe. They are alone more worthy of our notice than more double and refined ones. We are ignorant of their value till ſome cruel accident ſnatches them from us, and makes us ſenſible of their worth, by their abſence. Experience hath often avouched this truth. The ſad inſtance before our eyes ſhall confirm it.

If the author, under God, of his being, if his ſorrowful conſort weeps, be it to them ſome conſolation to find, that the public hath a

* Nec puer Iliacâ quiſquam de gente Latinos
In tantum ſpe tollet avos.

tear to ſpare, and jointly bemoans one common fate *. The man indeed that ſurvives a ſon ſo full of goodly hope and promiſe, ſurvives the nobleſt part of himſelf. He outlives the moſt pleaſing proſpect nature can have to preſent him with; the proſpect of one dearer than himſelf, ripening into qualities which muſt bring him upon the ſtage of the world with the greateſt luſtre. How large a portion of its happineſs muſt age derive from this moſt pleaſing of all views? How muſt it ever be opening and enlarging itſelf into agreeable future proſpects, as it contracts its operations in life? With what delightful enthuſiaſm muſt it glow in a father's mind, on the contemplation of ſo much growing goodneſs? May not men, under this happy enthuſiaſm, be ſaid to live every day over again? How calmly muſt they reſt in the arms of age, having outlived all their paſſions, except that, the exerciſe of which on its proper objects gives the moſt ſolid ſatisfaction? I mean that of filial affection. I ſhould have called it by a ſtronger name, were it poſſible. By ſuch aſſurance, a man that is capable of looking back, works ſo much of the agreeable object into his nature, that it is difficult to part with it without the utmoſt reluctance. A good man increaſes it, by adding the public loſs to his own; 'tis at laſt

* How ſimply beautiful is this deſcription of the Poet?

How ſleep the brave, who ſink to reſt,
With all their country's wiſhes bleſt?
When ſpring, with dewy fingers cold,
Returns to deck their hallow'd mold,
She there ſhall dreſs a ſweeter ſod,
Than Fancy's feet have ever trod.

By fairy hands their knell is rung;
By forms unſeen their dirge is ſung;
There Honour comes a pilgrim grey,
To bleſs the turf that wraps their clay;
And Freedom ſhall a while repair,
To dwell a weeping hermit there.

the ſum, how great! It ſhuts up the very avenues of expreſſion, and leaves room only for this big ſentiment of nature and humanity, *Would God I had died for thee!*

The public's and a father's loſs are not the whole upon the preſent occaſion. The late happy partner of his joys is now become a widow, and his children, orphans. In the midſt of the utmoſt affluence, how diſconſolate her condition! The moſt bountiful proviſion cannot raiſe her above our pity and compaſſion. His ſiſter *, with a tenderneſs peculiar to her ſex, and peculiar to herſelf, has given a ſad teſtimony of the ſorrow of her heart. His infants, too young to be ſenſible of their loſs, catch a ſorrow they know not the cauſe of, and wonder at nothing ſo much as the abſence of the hand that fondled them. They will become ſenſible of ſo great a loſs, when they ſhall have outgrown even the remembrance that they had one.

The diſpenſations of providence, how rigorous ſoever they may appear, are doubtleſs ever accompanied with the moſt excellent purpoſes. To the higher ranks of life, they hold out a mirror, which diſcovers how much is felt every day in the world, by loſſes that eſcape ſilent and unobſerved; how heavy they muſt needs be, under the aggravations of poverty and diſtreſs! Outward circumſtances cannot place the former beyond the reach of our pity, though they much affect the latter. The want of a parent is not the leaſt ſpecies of want that is felt. Common humanity muſt bear witneſs to this truth, and oppreſſion will ſometimes ſtop to hear it. In the more excellent purpoſes of life, a foreign hand but badly ſupplies the place. The well forming of our minds is a father's province, and but ſeldom executed ſo well by any other. The reaſon is obvious; example comes recommended with double force from that quarter. Men, the moſt re-

* Ducheſs of Marlborough.

ſpectleſs of their courſes, watch well their words and actions, when the prying eye of childhood is looking into their boſoms. They cannot but be ſenſible of the comelineſs and proportion of virtue, and how great an ornament it is to the human mind. They cannot but feel themſelves averſe from the cruelty of poiſoning the very ſprings of their own happineſs. There is a ſtandard of moral depravation, below which we cannot ſink, and at the ſame time preſerve the bare notion of our nature. A thouſand pleaſures muſt compenſate a man for the time devoted to ſo ſacred a ſervice. Since 'tis our early education that forms us into a character, it generally makes us what we are, it ſticks to us through life, and betrays us at every turn, when we mean to diſſemble. The beſt care will be taken doubtleſs to ſupply to them as far as poſſible, the loſs of ſo valuable a bleſſing. When the beloved wife of Jacob was dead, the humane patriarch transfers all his kind affection for her to her two children. The boundleſs ſtream of ſo much love could not have found a more natural channel. He that will catch the firſt dawnings of their reaſon, and will watch to form them into men, may never live to ſee the fruits of his pious care. He cannot hope to ſee them; our bounds are too narrowly circumſcribed to entertain the wiſh. In the preſent caſe, a father has beheld a plant, which his own hand carefully nurſed up, nipped in its very bloom; juſt as it began to reflect back the influence it had received, and gratefully repaid him for ſo much induſtry and care. Such promiſing hopes beat down, a man cannot build them up again. Even this ſad accident ſhews, "That he buildeth them ever upon the *waters, a tempeſt ſteal-*
"*eth them away in the night.* There is hope indeed of a tree, if it
"be cut down, that it will ſprout again, and that the tender branch
"thereof ſhall not ceaſe. There is aſſurance, that man will not, un-
"til the heavens ſhall be no more, till then he ſhall no more awake,
"nor be raiſed out of his ſleep."

His

His companions in proſperity will pardon me, if I hold up a mirror, which muſt diſcover to them their own mortality. "* Behold *him* as "in the months paſt, when God preſerved him, when, in Job's ad- "mirably beautiful language, the Almighty was with him—when "his children were about him—when he waſhed his ſteps in butter, "and the rock poured him out rivers of oil—when his glory was "freſh in him, and his bow was renewed in his hand——After his "words men ſpake not again, and his ſpeech dropped upon them—— "They waited for him as for the rain.——Surely then he might ſay, "I ſhall die in my neſt, I ſhall multiply my days as the ſand. How "ſoon, alas, is his harp turned into mourning, and his organ "into the voice of them that weep! Now is my ſoul poured out up- "on me, the days of affliction have taken hold of me."

"I ſaid in my proſperity, I ſhall never be moved," is the language of folly and preſumption. It is to build our houſe as the moth, or a booth that the keeper maketh. We are but of yeſterday, and, for want of knowledge, call thoſe things accidents, which have another name in heaven. There is an appointment and deſign in them, which we cannot ſee. There is nothing exempted from the activity of divine providence. Things the moſt caſual in their appearances, have their guidance and commiſſion from above. A man draws a bow at a ven- ture, 'tis God that directs it through the joints of Ahab's armour. By whatever ſecond cauſes they come, they lead the eye upwards to the hand that pointed them. When Priam came to beg the body of his ſlaugh- tered ſon, Achilles comforts him with a parabolical ſtory, concerning the two urns out of which Jupiter diſpenſed to every man his propor- tion of good or evil. By the wiſeſt among the ſons of Adam, of what the Almighty doth, how little is known? We ſee enough to convince

* Job, Chap. xxix.

us

us of his power and providence: all beyond this is a path, which the eye, more piercing than the vulture's, hath not ſeen. It were preſumption to ſearch further into them, or to ſubject God's operations to the ſcrutiny of our limited underſtandings. There is no contending againſt ſo much wiſdom, neither is there any dayſman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both. The day of man's death is a ſecret locked up in the divine breaſt. We know it not ourſelves. We may have no reaſon perhaps to bewail our ignorance in this reſpect. Did we know the preciſe time of our departure, we ſhould augment our ſorrows upon earth, by anticipating its arrival. The certain proſpect of our end would lay waſte the empire of that tormenting, pleaſing paſſion, hope. Admonitions as to the uncertainty of our continuance, are both frequent and friendly. One misfortune or other is every day turning our thoughts home upon ourſelves, and teaching us, that our ſtrength is not the ſtrength of ſtones, neither is our fleſh braſs.

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